

INSTRUCTOR/DRILL SERGEANT PILOT PROGRAM



BY COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR
JOSE L. SILVA

It's not easy being a drill sergeant. The idea of having drill sergeants began in 1962. Drill sergeant training programs began in 1963 at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and Fort Gordon, Georgia; and in 1964 at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. The success of these drill sergeant programs resulted in the adoption of a concept that still provides outstanding results today.

In April 2006, the US Army Quartermaster Center and School (QMC&S) volunteered for a US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) pilot program that explored the possibilities of utilizing noncommissioned officers (NCOs) as drill sergeants without the drill sergeant skill identifier. In an effort to augment NCOs in US Army Forces Command units and in support of the transformation of brigade combat teams, TRADOC asked, "What if drill sergeants were removed from advanced individual training (AIT) schoolhouses?" The idea of removing drill sergeants from AIT schoolhouses might seem extreme to some, but keep in mind that this is an action with the goal of supporting the global war on terrorism.

After some senior-level discussions, the QMC&S decided to be among the first to test the pilot program. Though there would be challenges, taking the lead would be appropriate since the Quartermaster Corps is the second largest branch in the Army with a total of 121,120 authorizations (including National Guard and Reserve). The QMC&S has an annual AIT student load of about

20,000 and an average daily load between 3,000 and 4,000 students.

The student load has already lead to changes in training strategies for some military occupational specialties. For example, the 92A and 92Y AIT courses are running a total of 59 classes (average 30 students per class), double shift (early/late shifts) to develop the students' technical and tactical expertise. Our field training exercises can train more than 400 Soldiers a week for 48 weeks a year at Fort Lee and Fort Pickett, Virginia. With the possibility of human resource restructuring taking place in our AIT environment, the QMC&S wanted to be the first to experience the consequences. Pilot programs are good because if something goes wrong, it is called feedback rather than failure. It allows for the opportunity to make corrections. Clear mission and vision statements are critical elements for a successful organization, especially when plowing new territory. Everyone has a key role to play.

Bravo and Tango Companies (food service training companies) from the 266th Quartermaster Battalion, 23d Quartermaster Brigade, were selected for the program. Drill sergeants moved from the company to the platform and platform instructors moved to the companies as drill sergeants. In order to increase the chances of success, a "pilot within the pilot" program was created to increase the flexibility of having two courses of action. Bravo Company had 4 platoon sergeants with 3 squad leaders/instructors per platoon, for a total of 16 NCOs.



Drill sergeants still play an important role in the daily lives of students at the US Army Quartermaster Center and School, Fort Lee, Virginia.

Tango Company had four platoon sergeants with two instructors per Platoon. Two additional NCOs were required to fulfill armorer and operations functions, for a total of 14 NCOs. Tango Company's AIT Soldiers would serve as squad leaders. These instructors inherited the entire package: the soldierization process, technical/tactical training, counseling, and mentoring/role modeling. From day one until the Soldiers graduated, they carried a glass ball that could not be dropped.

The fate of the drill sergeants program is still undecided. However, upon orders from TRADOC, the QMC&S stands ready to execute the program. The drill sergeants and instructors involved in the program are highly skilled and trained. When it comes to seeing the mission through, NCOs will always make it happen.

CSM Jose L. Silva is the 8th Regimental Command Sergeant Major for the Quartermaster Corps. He deployed to Uzbekistan for Operation Enduring Freedom as the 507th Logistics Task Force CSM and also served as the first Camp Sergeant Major for Camp Stronghold Freedom in Karshi-Khanabad. His responsibilities took him to Bagram, Mazare-Shariff, and Kabul. Then as the CSM for the 10th Division Support Command, 10th Mountain Division, Fort Drum, New York, he redeployed to Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom IV to serve as the Joint Logistics Center CSM before coming to the US Army Quartermaster Center and School, Fort Lee, Virginia. CSM Silva enlisted in the Army in July 1982 as an 11B (Infantryman) in the 82d Airborne Division. He became a Petroleum Supply Specialist in July 1986.